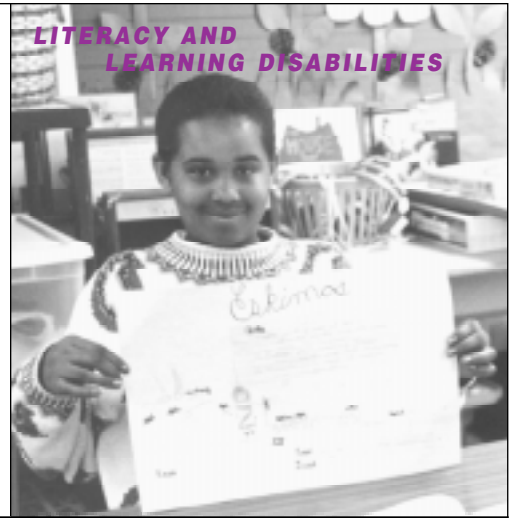


# THE Special EDge

## LITERACY AND LEARNING DISABILITIES



### 'WHOLE LANGUAGE REFUGEES'

## Reading Initiative May Decrease Special Ed Referrals

by Patricia Winget, Editor

Is it possible that 172,000 students in California labeled learning disabled may be merely the result of poor instruction—especially reading instruction? “Absolutely,” say prominent researchers and California educators.

Almost 345,000 students are diagnosed with a learning disability, usually not until third or fourth grade. But, far fewer would have been referred to special education if in kindergarten and first grade they had received proper reading instruction from informed teachers, said Reid Lyon, chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

During the past 35 years this institute has coordinated research of how more than 35,000 children learn to read and why children and adults have difficulties. Notably, in 1976 less than 5 percent of school-aged children were identified with a reading disability. By 199 that number had grown to 17 percent. Lyon said, “This is most likely due to better identification methods, but may also reflect the trend during the past 15 years to de-emphasize focused instruction in decoding and word recognition strategies for beginning readers.”

The NICHD research

found many children do not naturally acquire the phoneme awareness (understanding the sound structure of language) and phonics skills necessary to develop reading skills and require systematic instruction in these areas. “Because of major shifts to more wholistic methods of teaching beginning reading skills, many students may read poorly, not because they are dyslexic or reading disabled but because they simply have not been taught effectively,” Lyon said.

“I used to find significant reading comprehension difficulties in the children referred to special education assessment at my school,” observed Janny Latno, resource specialist at Loma Linda Elementary School in San Rafael. “Now every child that is referred is unable to decode, has no sound-symbol relationships, but usually has reading comprehension intact.” Latno believes that with early intervention and informed instruction these children can “be caught early.”

### Screening, Early Intervention

NICHD research concluded that if in kin-

dergarten and first grade, poor readers were identified through informal screening and instructed in phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies by well-trained teachers, 85 to 90 percent would achieve average reading

Difficulty with basic reading and language skills are the most common learning disabilities. As many as 80% LD students have reading problems.

(Kavale and Reese, 1992)

levels. “They would not have to ‘wait to fail’ to qualify for special education services with a learning disability in third or fourth grade,” Lyon said. Because if intervention is delayed until age 9, 75 percent will continue to have difficulty learning to read.

In California, this problem has been exacerbated by a reading-language arts curriculum that largely ignored phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling. After nine years of a “whole-language” approach to reading instruction that assumed children would learn to read through exposure to rich literature rather than direct, explicit instruction, the California Reading Initiative promotes a balanced, comprehensive approach.

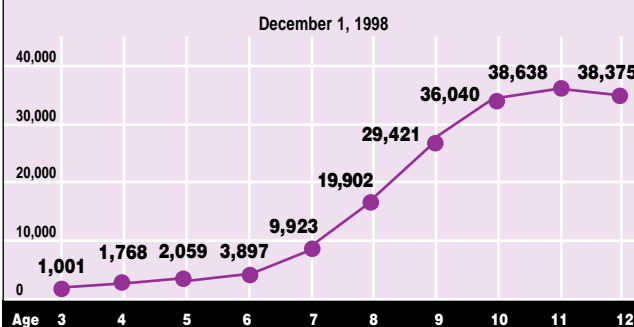
“It’s about time,” said Maureen Burness, assistant superintendent, Yolo County special education local plan area, and a member of the Special Education Reading Task Force. “Some children are labeled learning disabled because of our system. They’ve become ‘whole language refugees.’ We need to focus on effective instructional strategies for all of our students, and from day one.”

‘READING’ continues on page 7

More than 1 out of 6 young children, 17.5 percent, will encounter a problem learning to read in the ‘crucial first 3 years in school.’

(American Federation of Teachers, July 1997)

### AGES WHEN CALIFORNIA CHILDREN ARE IDENTIFIED WITH SEVERE LEARNING DISABILITIES



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Providing information  
development and  
dissemination for the  
California Special  
Education Division  
under the Comprehensive  
System of Personnel  
Development

## DIRECTIONS...



# Make Reading Top Priority

by Alice Parker, State Director of Special Education

**G**eneral educators and special educators must join together to ensure all students benefit from the California Reading Initiative (CRI). Reading is the gateway to knowledge and to success in life. The primary mission for everyone in public education must be to teach all children to read. Research confirms that students who do not learn to read at grade level by third grade will endure a lifelong struggle with reading. Sadly, this has been the case for too many students in both general and special education. The good news is there is a robust body of evidence that most students with reading difficulties can be taught to read *if they are provided intensive, early instruction that is direct, systematic, and research-based*.

The research that forms the basis of the CRI is inclusive, is intended for the full range of diverse learners, and assumes that virtually all students can learn to read. The CRI is important for all of California's students, but critical for students with reading difficulties or who have disabilities. I challenge superintendents, principals, professional development personnel, teachers, support services personnel, paraprofessionals, parents, and community partners to make reading a priority for every student.

The backbone of the CRI is the *English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* adopted by the State Board of Education December 1997. The standards define what students need to learn and what skills and abilities they need to master by the end of each grade level. The content is attainable by all students given sufficient time and instructional support, except for an extremely small percentage of students with severe disabilities.

The *Reading/Language Arts Framework* align the curriculum and instructional program to the *English-Language Arts Content Standards*. It is a guide for teachers, administrators, parents, and other support personnel on when to introduce knowledge and how to sustain the practice of skills leading all students to mastery. It also provides ways to assess and monitor student progress, design systematic support and intervention programs, and encourage parent involvement.

To meet the challenge of teaching all children to read, all instructional personnel and educational support staff, including those in special education, must have access to high quality, in-depth, and continuous professional development in research-based reading instruction and Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM). In addition to appropriate assessment used to determine eligibility for special education, CBM is important to help teachers write individualized education plan objectives, design individual student instructional services and sets of services, and to monitor the progress of students in the mastery of the content standards. Teachers and students must have access to high quality, research-based, instructional materials that support the delivery of sequential, systematic reading instruction. Critical is the need to ensure that reading instructional materials include age-appropriate materials that support teaching at the student's instructional level and decodable text to provide ample practice of newly taught skills.

The California Department of Education is implementing a new Special Education Focused Monitoring process. This system will document and follow the progress of students in special education. The acquisition of reading skills and progress in mastering *Reading-Language Arts Content Standards* is a major goal that will be monitored in every school and district. It is my hope that every California school will rise to the challenge of teaching all children to read. Through the focused monitoring system, we will move beyond basic compliance to focusing on quality educational programs for students with disabilities because compliance is a floor, not a ceiling. By itself, without high standards, it leads to status quo, or worse, mediocrity for children with disabilities. ☺

## EDITOR'S NOTE:


**T**his is the final edition of *The Special EDge* published by Resources in Special Education. We are proud to have been the voice of California special education over the past 12 years, bringing to nearly 250,000 people across the world current issues, new research, and exemplary programs and people. Steve Johnson, now Oregon's Director of Special Education, created *The Special EDge* name and allowed it to develop under his leadership. Karl Murray, now with the Council for Exceptional Children, fought for the institutionalization of this newsletter in his vision for a truly comprehensive system of personnel development, as did Michael Lewis of California State University, Sacramento, who fought for its integrity. Patrick Campbell, former state director, provided inspiring leadership, and Leo Sandoval, also a former state director, provided warm encouragement and support. CDE Administrators Marion Miller and Pat Dougan enthusiastically facilitated the RiSE project, along with Muffin Kent. Special thanks go to the highly skilled and talented RiSE production staff: Sandy Cosner, Elissa Provance, Meg Schroeder, and former writer Joyce Kirk.

Good luck to the CalSTAT project at Sonoma State University as they continue the fine tradition of *The Special EDge*. ☺

## ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT PILOT TESTING BEGINS

**D**raft guidelines have been developed for the assessment of students with disabilities who cannot participate in statewide or districtwide assessments. The guidelines are the basis for a small-scale pilot of alternate assessment procedures that will take place during the spring. An evaluation of the results by the Special Education Division will occur in July.

The individualized education program (IEP) determines the basis for alternate assessments. Students eligible for an alternate assessment should participate in a functional (not academic) curriculum covering domains such as communication, self-care, and mobility. A qualified teacher who is familiar with the student should use the completed IEP to rate the student's progress in meeting goals in the curriculum domains.

After revisions are made to the guidelines they will be prepared for additional review and statewide implementation. The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that alternate assessments be implemented by July 1, 2000. 






*For information, contact Mark Fetter, Assessment, Evaluation, and Support Unit, 916/322-0373. Drafts are available at [www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/altassmt.htm](http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/altassmt.htm).*

## ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES CONTINUE TO LAG BEHIND

**A** recent nationwide poll found that Americans with disabilities continue to lag well behind other Americans in many of the most basic aspects of life.

The 1998 National Organization on Disability/Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities was the third major survey to study the attitudes, experiences, and levels of participation of Americans with disabilities. Telephone interviews were conducted with 1,000 individuals with disabilities, aged 16 and older, as well as 905 adults without disabilities, aged 18 and older, to enable comparisons.


Following are some of the study's major findings:

-  Among adults with disabilities between ages 16-64, 29 percent work full- or part-time compared to 79 percent of individuals without disabilities.
-  The percentage of adults with disabilities without a high school education continues to exceed the rest of the population.
-  One-third of adults with disabilities lived in an annual household with an annual income of less than \$15,000 in 1997, compared to about 12 percent of those without disabilities.
-  Only 33 percent of adults with disabilities were very satisfied with life in general, compared to 61 percent of adults without disabilities. 

## MEXICO JOINS BORDER STATES FOR DIALOGUE

**S**haring and improving special education instructional techniques from preschool through high school was the theme of the recent United States/Border States' conference sponsored by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE).

California hosted special education directors from Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, and Florida as well as the Mexican states of Baja California, Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Sonora. Representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, and the Mexican Ministry of Education also attended.

Guests visited Napa, San Jose, and San Diego and observed various service delivery models, ranging from a bilingual special day class and dual immersion bilingual programs to full inclusion and teacher training programs. 

*For information, contact Belén Gonsalves, special education consultant, at 916/327-3720.*


## REGULATIONS PROVIDE CHARTER SCHOOLS A CHOICE IN PROVIDING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

**T**he State Board of Education (SBE) has unanimously approved emergency regulations governing special education services in charter schools.

The regulations offer charter schools two options in terms of the level of independence and responsibility they wish to assume with students with disabilities. The regulations also require that charter schools be treated fairly, regardless of which option they select.

**1. Public School:** if a charter school chooses to be a public school for special education purposes, the final responsibility for providing services is with the district that granted that charter. The charter school would likely have less flexibility in how it designs its programs since it would have to coordinate with the district's already established programs, but it would also not be held responsible in a due process hearing.

**2. Local Education Agency (LEA):** if a charter school opts to become an LEA, it, not the district that granted the charter, assumes the responsibility for providing special education and related services. The charter school may have more flexibility in how it provides services, but it also is responsible for the provision of those services. Charter schools that elect to be LEAs would also receive a direct allocation of special education funding through the special education local plan area allocation plan.





The emergency regulations are in effect for 120 days following approval by the Office of Administrative Law. Following a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking by SBE, public hearings will also be conducted. 

*For information, contact Greg Hudson, special education consultant, at 916/445-4544.*

## PARTNERSHIP BEGINS GRANT IMPLEMENTATION

**C**alifornia recently was awarded more than \$9 million or approximately \$1.8 million per year for five years by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs to implement the State Improvement Plan through personnel development activities. The Partnership Committee on Special Education has begun coordination of implementation efforts to improve existing systems for educational, early intervention, and transition services.

The grant focuses on high academic standards, results, transitions standards, disciplinary strategies, education reform coordination, service integration/coordination, consumer/parent involvement, and research-based strategies for students, teachers/potential teachers, and educational systems over five years. Goals for each targeted group include the following:

-  **Students**—definitions of school and postschool results; assistance and support during transitions; and reducing or eliminating the use of suspension and expulsion.
-  **Teachers**—professional development in the areas of transition and research-based teaching practices; reducing the percentage of teachers with 30-day substitute emergency permits, emergency permit waivers, emergency permits, and credential waivers; and increasing resources and technical assistance to help implement research-based strategies.
-  **Educational System**—focus on the need to serve all children, service integration, and coordination of state and local agencies to maximize student outcomes; placement-neutral funding; and consumer and parental involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating system-level reform. 

*For more information, contact Janet Canning, special education consultant, at 916/327-4217 or [www.sonoma.edu/cihs/calstat/pcsegoals.obj.act.html](http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/calstat/pcsegoals.obj.act.html).*





## BUSY SESSION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION BILLS

The 1999-2000 legislative session has been one of the busiest in recent memory for the special education community. Following are brief summaries of current legislative activities, including an update on Senate Bill (SB) 989 regarding certification of nonpublic schools/agencies (NPS/As), diplomas for individuals with exceptional needs, and recommendations from the Assembly Bill (AB) 602 Workgroup, which studied compliance issues as they relate to the new special education funding model.

**AB 355 (Davis):** requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education to develop and adopt goals and standards for pupils with exceptional needs consistent with those for all pupils. The Superintendent would also be responsible for operating a complaint management and resolution process for allegations of school districts failing to provide educational services. Legislative recommendations from the AB 602 Workgroup include adopting language proposed by the Advisory Commission on Special Education relating to educational progress of students with disabilities and statutory deadlines after which instances of individual and systemic noncompliance would be deemed persistent and require sanctions.

Administrative recommendations include the California Department of Education developing regulations and guidelines for annual service and budget plans; coordinating budget plans with the statewide account code structure; developing a data collection system to measure progress and to analyze trends in identifying service levels, complaint investigations, and the local plan review process to target local education agencies and special education local plan areas for possible monitoring; and corrective action plans that include parents and trustees to assist LEAs.

**AB 395 (Dutra):** modifies and repeals many of the current laws with respect to the state diagnostic centers and special schools. Deletes the sunset date for special education and provides state law amendments corresponding to the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

**AB 422 (Steinberg):** requires publishers or manufacturers of instructional materials offered for adoption or sale in California to provide these materials in alternate forms such as Braille, large print, recordings, or other accessible media.

**AB 570 (Dickerson):** proposes a five-year phase-in to reduce special day class size and caseloads for certified instructional personnel.

**AB 645 (Honda):** revises juvenile court law to require the court, court-appointed special advocates, probation officers, and social workers to ensure that children with special needs receive any special education services and accommodations that they are entitled to under state and federal law.

**AB 945 (Maldonado):** deletes the provision authorizing school personnel to assist individuals with exceptional needs who require specialized physical health care needs. Authorizes qualified designated school personnel, who are trained and supervised by a nurse or licensed physician and surgeon, to do so. Prohibits cer-

tified instructional staff from being required to assist individuals with exceptional needs who require specialized physical care needs.

**AB 1020 (Corbett):** permits a referral for assessments to be made by a guardian, foster parent, pupil advocate, or designated adult representative of an individual, a person acting in the place of a parent, or a person legally responsible for the child's welfare.

**AB 1054 (Oller):** states when a special education student transfers from a school district school to a charter school, the district will continue to receive equal funding that it would otherwise receive if the student was still enrolled without reducing the funding provided to the charter school.

**AB 1062 (Margett):** requires the award of a diploma to individuals with exceptional needs who meet certain requirements. The bill would also authorize the award of a certificate or document of educational achievement to an individual with exceptional needs who meets certain criteria.

**SB 487 (C. Wright):** appropriates \$19.4 million from the General Fund to the State Department of Mental Health for purposes of expanding children's mental health services under the Children's Mental Health Services Act.

**SB 1035 (Hughes):** requires state and county superintendents of public instruction and divisions of special schools and special education to work collaboratively to establish a statewide regionalized system for delivering quality programs and related services to pupils who are deaf and hard of hearing.

**SB 989 (1996, Polanco):** required the Superintendent of Public Instruction and stakeholder groups to develop regulations for certification of nonpublic schools/agencies. Emergency regulations were adopted in July 1997 and at its May 1999 meeting, the State Board of Education unanimously voted to adopt final regulations, which include personnel provisions for behavior interventionists and whether they should be required to hold a credential, the main point of conflict during this three-year process. To adequately address the issue, the final regulations distinguish between the designers and planners of behavior interventions and the implementors of the behavior plans. For the former, the minimum standard is a Master's degree in a related field with no required credential and for the latter, the minimum standard is a high school diploma. The implementor will be monitored by the student's individualized education program (IEP) team.

**AJR 12 (Lempert):** petitions the President and Congress to provide the full federal share of funding for special education. ■

## RECOGNIZING POTENTIAL SPECIAL NEEDS EARLY

To help parents and other individuals who care for children identify potential signs of developmental delay or other risk factors that may require special education or early intervention services, the California Department of Education (CDE), in collaboration with the California Child Care Health Program, produced "Early Warning Signs."

The revised brochure describes a variety of factors in eight categories, such as General Behavior, Hearing, Moving, and Playing, that indicate a child may need further observation and assessment. The information also encourages caregivers to seek help as early as possible so more serious problems may be avoided. ■

For copies of the brochure, contact CDE Press at 800/995-4099.

## ADVISORY COMMISSION ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

### COMMISSION JOINS STATE BOARD TO ADDRESS READING

by Larry Komar, Chair

In March 1998, the State Board of Education (SBE) asked the Advisory Commission on Special Education for assurances that the State Improvement Plan (SIP), State Special Education Plan, and Implementation Plan addressed the provision of effective reading instruction to students.

SBE members wanted to ensure that special education children would receive training in basic reading skills, that a link was established between special education teachers and general education teachers, that any plan included the state reading initiative, and that all special education teachers were provided recent research on the provision of reading skills.

A subcommittee determined the appropriate document to use in providing these assurances would be the SIP. With this knowledge and the convening of the statewide Partnership Committee on Special Education, where some 100 representatives of agencies, organizations, and other individuals met to develop the SIP, reading became one of the established goals.

We will continue our efforts to ensure reading literacy skills are a focus by serving as liaison to a reading committee established by the SBE to further the understanding of the literacy needs of all children. We believe that many of the more than 600,000 children in special education are there, not because of a learning disability, but because we have failed to teach them the most basic requirement for learning—how to read. ■

For information, contact Darlene Helbling, commission secretary, at 916/445-4603.

Marion Joseph, Chair, Special Education Reading Task Force

## Improving Literacy for Everyone

by Elissa Provance, Associate Editor

When a recent meeting of the Special Education Reading Task Force wrapped up, Marion Joseph embraced each of the 15 participants present and expressed her excitement at the progress being made. Then she turned around, put her hands to her cheeks, and to no one in particular, said, "Yes! Another \$10 million for reading."

Joseph, co-chair of the task force, which is charged with preparing *Reading and Special Education in California: Critical Ideas to Focus Meaningful Reform*, an issue paper on the California Reading Initiative, was referring to Senate Bill 889, proposed legislation she helped author that would establish the Middle Grades Reading Competency Act. Although she began actively advocating for literacy in the past decade, Joseph is no stranger to education reform or the political arena.

"I was always a political junkie," said Joseph, a State Board of Education member and alternate representative of the Board to the Advisory Commission on Special Education. "The citizen role in politics is one that takes a lot of work and a lot of effort but in a democratic society, it's how we govern ourselves collectively."

Having earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1947, Joseph planned to enter law school. But her career path took a detour in 1962 while working on the "Ralph Richardson for State Superintendent of Public Instruction" campaign. "I met a man while working on that campaign whose name was Wilson Riles," she said, "and I was whisked away into education reform."

Eight years later, it was the "Wilson Riles for State Superintendent" primary campaign that Joseph successfully ran on a mere \$75,000. Riles would become California's first African American superintendent and Joseph would serve as his executive assistant until 1982. "It took enormous effort," Joseph said of the experience, "but we went into every community. It was the only way to elect a black man in those days. First you went to the respected leaders and had them meet him. Once they did, they recognized his enormous ability and his commitment to children. Then they became leaders in their community."

Four campaigns and 12 years later, having worked on such issues as early childhood education and the Master Plan for Special

Education, Joseph said, "It was time to go home." Her husband, David, a pioneer in the environmental movement, had just accepted a job as director of the North Coastal Water Policy Control Board. "Our son, Daniel, is a horticulturist and I'm an amateur horticulturist. I thought we'd build greenhouses, grow wonderful plants, and work on local campaigns for environmental issues," Joseph said.

That plan worked fine until 1989, when her oldest daughter, Linda, a school psychologist, and mother to then first-grader Isaac, asked her to attend an open house at Isaac's school. After

asking the teacher for books she used to teach reading and discovering there weren't any, the shocked and politically savvy Joseph began asking questions.

"I called people I knew," she said, "and asked, 'Is there a problem with implementing the language arts curriculum?'" After a year of learning about the problems, the retired grandmother of three put down her gardening equipment, picked up her car keys, and headed back to Sacramento.

It was during one of those trips, driving on Interstate 101, that Joseph heard researcher Reid Lyon on National Public Radio discussing reading problems. She contacted him and almost overnight, learned of 20 years of research from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "It's not a race or a poverty issue," Joseph said of California's poor performance on national reading tests. "It's kids not being taught properly." This included Isaac, now 16, who had been in a resource specialist program. Joseph knew, even as early as 1991, "If we don't solve this problem, there's no plan B. Children need clear, systematic instruction to learn decoding, phonemic awareness, and comprehension. Children don't learn how to read through osmosis."

Finally, in 1996, after countless conversations with legislators, newspaper editors, and state education leaders, the California Reading Initiative was enacted. In 1997, English-Language Arts Content Standards were adopted, and recently, the Reading/Language Arts Curriculum Framework was completed.

Joseph admitted that if she wasn't working on improving literacy, "I'd be playing with my grandchildren and in my rose bushes. But I need to stay for the adoption of books. Teachers need materials. They want children to learn. We must give them the tools they need to make sure that happens."



Final regulations governing **Assembly Bill 3632** take effect July 1, 1999. These interagency regulations among the California Departments of Education, Health Services, and Mental Health cover occupational therapy, physical therapy, and mental health services for students in special education.

**The National Collegiate Athletic Association** is revising policies that have prevented students with learning disabilities from playing college sports and receiving scholarships. For information, call 800/514-0301 or visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>.

**The America Reads Challenge Resource Kit**, designed to help communities create after school or summer tutoring projects, includes tips for serving children most in need, links to research on literacy, and "Checkpoints for Progress." See <http://www.ed.gov/units/americanreads/resourcekit/>.

**8x8 Video TTY™ Videophone** allows callers who are deaf to see live motion images of the people to whom they are talking. Call 888/289-6889 (V/TTY) for information.

The California Association of Professors of Special Education School Educators recently honored **Marie Schrup**, consultant for the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

**FY 2000 Annual Plan** describes strategies for meeting performance goal indicators in the U.S. Department of Education's strategic plan. See <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/planrpts.html>.

A survey by the **U.S. Department of Education** revealed that four out of five teachers reported they were not ready to teach in today's classrooms and more than one-third said they either don't have degrees in the subjects they teach or didn't spend enough time training.

**Review of Charter School Legislation Provisions Related to Students with Disabilities** examines statutes in 29 states. See <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/chartlegis/>.

**Charter Schools & Students with Disabilities: Review of Existing Data 1998** summarizes research data and policy analyses focusing on charter schools and students with disabilities. See <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/chartdisab/>.

**New 1999 initiatives** include Class Size Reduction, Reading Excellence, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. See <http://www.ed.gov/units/FY99/index.html>.

**Learning Disabilities Online** contains links, information for parents and professionals, resources, and a newsletter. See <http://www.ldonline.org>.

**Critical Discoveries in Learning Disabilities** contains A *Summary of Findings by NIH Research Programs in Learning Disabilities Research Centers Report* from the 1996 LDA Conference. See <http://www.ldonline.org/newsbriefs/jul96/mcelgunn.html>.

A website with beginning information and links to the **definitions of learning disabilities**, incidence, characteristics, educational implications and more is available at [http://www.kidsource.com/NICHCY/learning\\_disabilities.html](http://www.kidsource.com/NICHCY/learning_disabilities.html).

The home page of the **Learning Disabilities Association** links resources and information. See <http://www.ldonline.org/Aindex.html>.

**What is Meant By Learning Disabilities?** was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. See [http://www.chadd.org/doe/doe\\_ld.htm](http://www.chadd.org/doe/doe_ld.htm).

The discussion about keys to successful learning from the **National Center for Learning Disabilities'** summit in Washington D.C. is available at <http://www.NCLD.ORG/>.

The California Reading Initiative is an ongoing, multifaceted effort to improve the reading achievement and literacy levels of California's students. Students with disabilities as well as those at risk of disabilities are to be included in this statewide effort.

## INTERRELATED COMPONENTS

1. Class size reduction
2. Instructional materials, grades K-8, anchored to English-Language Arts Content Standards
3. Special funding to purchase instructional materials, grades K-8
4. Staff development
5. Partnerships with colleges and universities to improve preservice preparation in reading instruction
6. Reading Instruction Competency Assessment (RICA) for credentialed teachers, October 1, 1998
7. Comprehensive Reading Leadership Training Program for school board members, administrators, and teacher leaders, 1997-98
8. English-Language Arts Standards, K-8, adopted December 1997
9. Reading/Language Arts Curriculum Framework, adopted December 1998
10. Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, first implemented spring 1998; criterion-referenced test items added spring 1999 which report individual student test scores for performance on the English-Language Arts Standards, grades 2-8
11. Special funding for systems of support and resources, including:
  - California Public School Library Act of 1998, which increased funds for school library books
  - Student Academic (Service) Partnership Program, which enabled school districts to form partnerships with colleges and universities to provide preservice training and secure tutoring assistance, grades K-6

## Current Supporting Legislation

**State Instructional Materials Funds—**School boards must hold public hearings and determine whether textbooks or instructional materials are consistent with the curriculum framework. Provides additional funds for more materials.

**Instructional Materials: Adoption Criteria—**Added more reading/language arts and math materials aligned with content standards that can be a full or partial program of study.

**Core Reading Program Instructional Materials—**State Board-adopted core reading program materials to be furnished to each pupil, grades K-3.

**New Teacher Reading Instruction Development Program—**Grants to provide specific inservice training to new teachers (including special education teachers) who provide direct instruction to pupils grades K-3.

**Reading Standards & Intervention Programs—**Inservice training grants to teachers who provide direct instruction in reading, grades 4-12, to students who score below the 40th percentile on the Stanford 9, or teachers in schools with phonics-based programs for students scoring below the 25th percentile.

**Teacher Reading Instruction Development Program—**School districts must certify that not less than 90 percent of certificated employees who provide direct instruction to pupils, grades K-3 or 4-8 in reading or English-Language Arts, received training incorporating the Comprehensive Reading Leadership Program.

**Preservice Reading Partnership Grants—**Grants to support the development of preservice reading instruction curricula and the dissemination of materials to improve preservice preparation and beginning teacher induction and support, and to ensure well-trained teachers.

**Class Size Reduction—**Funding to reduce K-3 class size to no more than 20 pupils per certificated teacher. This does not include classes with special education pupils enrolled in special day classes on a full-time basis. Staff development in specific areas is provided.

**Teacher Credentialing—**Minimum requirements for obtaining a multiple subject or single subject teaching credential includes satisfactory completion of a comprehensive reading instruction that is research-based and includes the study of direct, systematic, explicit phonics.

**Teacher Credentialing: Inservice Training for Reading Instruction—**A reading instruction competence assessment to measure an individual's knowledge, skill, and ability relative to effective reading instruction.

**Teacher Credentials: Reading Certificate—**Standards for a restricted reading credential to provide for early development of reading and language arts skills and the early correction of a pupil's reading difficulties.

**Student Academic Partnership Program—**Funding to colleges and universities to work with local schools (grades K-6) to provide tutors and expose college students to teaching careers.

**California Public School Library Act—**Funding to improve school libraries.

## Guiding Principles of the Reading/Language Arts Framework

- Virtually all students can learn to read.
- All children must be fluent readers by the end of the third grade.
- A preventive, not remedial, approach is promoted.
- The full range of learners in the classroom is addressed.
- All learners work toward the same standards, but may not acquire skills and knowledge at the same rate.
- The Reading/Language Arts Content Standards form the curricular platform.
- Curriculum, assessment, instruction, and organization are aligned to provide a comprehensive, coherent structure for language arts teaching and learning.
- A balanced, comprehensive program is stressed.
- Specific individual reading, writing, speaking and listening skills at each grade level must be taught and learned.
- Language arts are related, reciprocal processes that build on and strengthen each other and can be learned across all academic disciplines.



## PHONEMIC AWARENESS CRUCIAL IN DEVELOPING PHONICS SKILLS, FLUENCY AND AUTOMATIC WORD READING

The reading development of more than 35,000 children has been studied during the past 35 years in numerous research studies sponsored by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), National Institutes of Health. The following findings were presented as testimony by G. Reid Lyon, Ph.D., Chief, Child Development and Behavior Branch, July 10, 1997 to the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Education and the Workforce.

- Screening tests of phonemic awareness skills in kindergarten and first grade predict with 95 percent accuracy who will have difficulties learning to read.
- These 15-minute screenings cost \$10 to \$15.
- To learn to read, a child must integrate phonemic skills into learning phonic principles, must practice reading so word recognition is rapid and accurate, and must learn how to actively use comprehension strategies to enhance meaning.
- Environment and genetics play major roles in learning to read.
- Different neural patterns in good and poor readers can be seen in brain imaging and may provide new insights into more precise and effective intervention strategies.
- Just as many girls as boys have difficulties learning to read.
- Prevention and early intervention before nine years of age that combine instruction in phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies provided by well-trained teachers can increase reading skills to average reading levels for 85 to 90 percent of poor readers. If intervention is delayed until age nine, approximately 75 percent of these children will continue to have difficulties learning to read throughout high school and their adult years.
- No single method, approach, or philosophy for teaching reading is equally effective for all children. The key to ensuring that all children reach their potential in learning to read rests with the formal training and experiences that teachers receive in assessing individual differences in learning to read during preschool, kindergarten and primary grade years. Teachers must develop in-depth knowledge about reading development and difficulties, have a clear understanding of the critical skills for learning to read and reading to learn, and have the depth and breadth of knowledge to develop research-based instruction.

## Reading Resources in Print & On Line

*Guide to the California Reading Initiative 1996-1999:*

*Definitions and Research Findings, Legislation and Funding Sources (1999 ed.)*

Sacramento: California State Board of Education, Comprehensive Reading Leadership Center, Sacramento County Office of Education.

*The California Reading Language Arts Framework*

*for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (1999).*

Sacramento: California Department of Education.

*English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, K-12*

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/board/standards.html>

*The California Reading Initiative*

[http://www.cde.ca.gov/cilbranch/eltdiv/rdg\\_init.htm](http://www.cde.ca.gov/cilbranch/eltdiv/rdg_init.htm)

*LD Online Reading*

[http://www.ldonline.org/ld\\_indepth/reading/reading.html](http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/reading/reading.html)

*Learning to Read, Reading to Learn*

<http://idea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/programs/read.html>

### "READING" Continued from page 1

#### Special Ed Reading Task Force

The California Department of Education, represented by Alice Parker, and the State Board of Education represented by Marion Joseph, convened this task force to ensure that special educators and parents are not left out of the California Reading Initiative (CRI) and the wealth of new research, training, and materials to improve how reading is taught to all children.

"We have to believe in our hearts that all children can read and become important leaders in our communities," maintained Parker. "We have to ensure access to meaningful instructional content."

"Raising general and special educators' awareness of the benefit the CRI has for students with disabilities is the first step to changing instructional practice," noted Beth Rice, special education consultant and task

force coordinator. Rice explained the goal of the task force is to increase the number of students who are proficient readers and who demonstrate progress in achieving mastery of the English-Language Arts Standards. This can be accomplished by

1. linking special education and general education in the implementation of the CRI;
2. increasing opportunities for quality professional development in reading instruction; and
3. ensuring that students with disabilities benefit from the opportunities of the CRI.

#### Reading is Top Learning Disability

Systematic, explicit instruction in reading before age 9 has been proven to increase the reading levels of poor readers. Given that 80 percent of children identified with a learning disability have primary difficulties in learning to read, improved reading instruction as advocated by the CRI and the Special Education

Reading Task Force could dramatically affect the 344,824 students currently classified as learning disabled in California, as well as emerging readers.

Lyon pointed out, "Phonemic awareness skills assessed in kindergarten and first grade serve as potent predictors of difficulties learning to read." A 15-minute screening test can predict quite accurately those students who are at risk of developing a reading and, if not addressed early, a learning disability. An early intervention program combining the elements of effective reading instruction significantly improves a child's ability to read.

Without it, students are forced to 'wait to fail' in order to qualify for special education services. This is usually in third or fourth grade when a large enough discrepancy can be detected between their academic achievement and IQ. Lyon explained that due to the test

'READING' continues on page 14

# THE CALIFORNIA READING INITIATIVE

## Changing the

*In 1996, the California Reading Initiative began changing the way reading is taught in kindergarten through 12th grade to all students, regardless of designation or label. Because more than 80 percent of referrals to special education involve reading difficulties, it is especially important for teachers and administrators in both general and special education to understand the links among research, instruction, access to core curriculum, assessment, and early intervention with emerging and early readers.*

*The following feature stories, written by Associate Editor Elissa Provance, illustrate how two schools in Sonoma and Monterey have addressed literacy. Mattie Washburn Elementary School in Windsor uses a preventive approach that creatively uses resources to identify and serve students who might need extra help as early as kindergarten. Marina Del Mar Elementary School in Marina uses a research-based reading program with a 30-year track record. Using these methods to teach literacy provides students in special education more than just access to the general curriculum.*



*Second-grade Reading Specialist Judy Harris works with Amber Whitmore as Chris Connor and other classmates read on their own.*

## Kids Start O

**W**hen Benita Jones, principal of Mattie Washburn Elementary School, speaks to colleagues about SKOR (Starting Kids Out Right), she distributes the candy bar that shares the same name. As they indulge in the sugar coated, toffee confection, the audience quickly learns

that the similarities end there.

The Mattie Washburn version of SKOR is an early intervention, school-based program at the K-2 primary school in Windsor Unified School District in Sonoma county, that supports the school's regular reading curriculum.

"The whole concept behind SKOR," explained Jones, "is to get kids comfortable and familiar with reading, which means things like book handling or knowing the parts of a book. We don't want

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## Helping Students Master Reading

**M**ore than 30 years after its introduction, a research-based literacy program continues to reach its goal of helping students become effective readers. Its success is especially notable at Marina Del Mar Elementary School, where one-third of the students are limited-English-proficient and where 14 different languages are spoken.

"Literacy is the highest area of focus here because it's the highest area of need," explained Carol Gurulé, principal of the K-5 school in Monterey county that serves 345 students. "We are located in a high transiency, low socioeconomic area on the Monterey peninsula. Many kids have not had a lot of exposure to printed materials or an enriched home environment. We try to provide that exposure."

A district-adopted special education reading program, which made its debut in 1968 and was originally used for at-risk students, Reading Mastery is a carefully designed program that focuses on explicit and systematic instruction. "It is now used with a whole range of IQ levels," noted Barbara Johnson, program specialist for Monterey County Office of Education. "Lower level readers will excel, as will higher level readers. Effective instruction is effective instruction."

*Esmeralda Guevara practices her reading skills in Kathy Knight's special day class.*



### Skeptics are Sold

News of the reading program's success was bitter-sweet for Kathy Knight, a special day class teacher at Marina Del Mar. "When I began teaching 24 years ago, I was very opposed to this type of instruction," she said. "It was so regimented. I thought I could be more creative!"

Knight now easily admitted, "Systematic instruction has been very effective with my kids," referring to her 12 students ranging from first to fifth grade, who have learning disabilities, cerebral palsy, and visual and hearing impairments. "It's a phonetic-based program that's very sequential with a lot of repetition."



*George Hernandez, left, a fifth-grader at third-grader Giovanni Perez.*



# ways reading is taught

## ut Right in Sonoma's Primary School Program

a fear level associated with reading. We want it to be a way of life."

### Prevention, Not Remediation

Prior to SKOR's inception four years ago, Jones noted that the school basically had two program options—general education and special education.

"There was a major gap with nothing in-between," she said. "Assessment means a lot of testing, a lot of money, and a lot of time before you find out if a child needs special education services or if he or she is just not developmentally ready to read." Adding that this was before class size reduction, Jones said, "There were 28 or 29 kids

in a first-grade class. Teachers were struggling with young children learning to read."

oding skills in 1st and  
d grades are highly  
ctive of comprehension  
skills in 9th grade.

cut Longitudinal Study, Shaywitz et al.,  
1990,1992)



Marina del Mar, tutors

age. Pictures are initially used to teach students to classify, a preskill for main idea. For example, pictures may be presented of a girl doing three different activities: digging a hole, putting a tree in the ground, and covering up the hole. Students are taught to identify the main thing the character is doing, so in this example, the girl is planting a tree.

Lessons, 160 for just for the first grade level, progress from sounds, rhyming skills, and blending, to sentences, stories, reading, and comprehension. "Initially, continuous sounds are taught, then you move to high frequency sounds," explained Johnson. "The whole point is to make recognition of spelling patterns effortless and automatic so students can concentrate on comprehension."

An important comprehension skill in the reading program is to formulate the main idea of a pas-

'HELPING' continues on page 12

The objective of SKOR, which includes a team of reading specialists and a speech and language therapist as well as key features such as KinderClub, Monarch Reading, and an assessment component, was to increase and coordinate the resources available to students when assistance would have the greatest impact, thereby reducing the need for costly special education services.

"We're all unified by our commitment to develop

literacy skills," said Kevin Feldman, director of reading and intervention for Sonoma County Office of Education. "It's all about how you deploy and utilize your resources. At Mattie Washburn, they say, 'Here are the kids. Here's what they need. What are the wisest ways to work collaboratively?'"

'KIDS' continues on page 12

For 80 to 90 percent of poor readers, prevention and early intervention programs that combine instruction in phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies provided by well-trained teachers can increase their reading skills to average reading levels.  
(Lyon, 1997)

### A Primer on Phonemic Awareness

**What it is.** Phonemic awareness is defined as "the conscious awareness that words are made up of phonemes or sounds." It is a critical skill for learning to read and write in an alphabetic language.

**Why it's important.** The high correlation between phonemic awareness and current (and future) reading achievement has been documented by several researchers. While the extent to which phonemic awareness is a cause of a result of learning to read remains unclear, most researchers agree that the relationship is reciprocal and that some skills (like blending) may play a causal role while others (like segmenting) may develop as a student learns to read. It is clear, however, that "children without phonemic awareness tend to be poor readers and that training in phonemic awareness can improve reading achievement."

**How to teach it.** Research suggests that phonemic awareness can be developed before reading ability and it facilitates subsequent acquisition of reading skills; training programs that have been studied and found to be effective are explicit in their presentation of phonemic skills; letter sound should be taught along with auditory skills; and both segmenting and blending activities should be included in a training program.

### Eight Characteristics of Effective Phonemic Awareness Instruction

1. The importance of modeling.
2. A scope and sequence with activities that progress from easy to hard.
3. Larger units should be taught before smaller units.
4. Continuous sounds should be used before stop sounds.
5. Examples with fewer sounds should be used before examples with more sounds.
6. Auditory blending should precede segmenting.
7. Teach blending.
8. Oral before written language.

Source: Vicki E. Snider (1995). *School Psychology Review* 24(3), pp. 143-155.

# New IDEA Regulations Take Effect

by Michael Kullman, Project Associate, with Elissa Provance, Associate Editor

**A**fter analyzing 6,000 comments and making changes to nearly 60 percent of the proposed regulations, the final regulations for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1997 (IDEA) took effect May 11. The reauthorized law emphasizes the original goal of providing a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities, plus focuses on improving results for all students.

Among the themes reflected in the recently released regulations are:

- Strengthening parent participation
- Accountability for students' participation and success in the general education curriculum and individualized education program (IEP) goals/objectives
- Disciplinary procedures

"The goal," said Art Cernosia, a Vermont attorney who recently provided training on the new IDEA regulations to California parents, teachers, administrators, and advocates, "is to keep kids the center of your focus."

## What it Means to Be a Parent

Two influential changes in parent participation are that the definition of "parent counseling and training," under related services has been amended to mean "helping parents acquire the necessary skills that will allow them to support the implementation of their child's IEP or individualized family service plan (IFSP)," and language stating that parents must be given a copy of their child's IEP free of cost and without having to request it.

Parents must now be included in all meetings, such as those for evaluation or placement. The measuring stick to invite a parent to a meeting, noted Cernosia, is to determine whether a discussion is taking place or a decision is being made about the student. Placement, he added, refers to the continuum of services, not a specific location or classroom.

Other provisions include a guarantee that "individuals who have knowledge or special expertise" may be invited to participate on the

IEP team. Parental consent must be informed, which means the consent information must be presented in the parents' native language along with an explanation of what it means. And the definition of parent has been amended to clarify that the term means a natural or adoptive parent of a child and a person acting in the place of a parent such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare.

## High Standards for All

To ensure students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum, the regulations require that a student's IEP focus on the general curriculum and consider the specific needs of each student and how to best meet those needs. Said Cernosia, "It's not just about access, but also quality services." This means that a child is assumed to be served in the general education classroom. Additionally, the IEP must document why a student is participating in less than 100 percent of the general curriculum.

Promoting high standards and expectations for all students is also evident in the law's requirement for state performance goals for children with disabilities. As part of its Quality Assurance and Focused Monitoring, California is developing key performance indicators against which student success will be measured. One of those measures is statewide and district-wide assessments. California has developed guidelines for those students who need accommodations in the administration of the test and is currently developing them for those who will take an alternate assessment.

## Discipline Provisions Amended

"Inappropriate behavior is not a category

of disability," noted Cernosia. With this in mind, the final regulations provide specificity on several key issues with respect to discipline to maintain a balance between providing a free appropriate public education and concur-

rently a safe environment conducive to learning. A summary of discipline provisions follows:

- School officials may suspend a student with a disability for up to 10 days at a time and for "additional removals of up to 10 days for separate acts of misconduct

as long as the removals do not constitute a pattern."

- A change in placement occurs when a child is removed for more than 10 consecutive school days or when a series of removals constitute a pattern based on the length of time the student was removed, the total amount of time removed, and how close the removals were to each other.
- Schools do not need to provide educational services to students with disabilities during the first 10 days of suspension.
- During any subsequent suspension for less than 10 days, services must be provided that allow the student to progress in the general curriculum and to advance toward achieving their IEP goals. School personnel in consultation with the special education teacher determine the required services.
- A manifestation determination is required only for a suspension that results in a change of placement.
- Behavioral assessments and the development of behavioral intervention plans require a meeting of the child's IEP team no later than 10 days after a suspension that led to the student being placed in an alternative educational setting.

## Redefining Categories, Final Thoughts

One of the changes in definitions regarding IDEA '97 is the inclusion of attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as specific examples of eligible conditions under the other health impaired (OHI) category. The inclusion of heightened alertness to environmental stimuli is now included in part of the description of OHI with respect to ADD/ADHD.

"There are a lot of challenges," said Cernosia, "I encourage everyone to participate in making this law work for kids." *ie*

## IEP AND EDUCATION WITH NONDISABLED STUDENTS

### IEP must include

- Statement of student's present levels; how their disability affects their participation in the general curriculum.
- Statement of measurable annual goals.
- A statement of the special education and related services and program modifications required to support the student.

### Inclusion of a general education teacher at the IEP with the following provisions

- If the child has more than one general education teacher the LEA designates which teacher(s) will participate.
- A case-by-case determination of the extent of involvement of general education teachers.

**Each IEP member must be informed of his or her responsibilities to implement the IEP and the accommodations, modifications, and supports required for the child.**


## GRANT MAY LEAD TO RESTRUCTURING

by Pamela Nevills, Co-Chair

**P**owerful issues are forcing general and special education to look at the way education is structured and certainly the way children receive their education. Due to issues such as Assembly Bill 602, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Quality Assurance and Focused Monitoring, social promotion, Stanford-9 assessment, the Reading Initiative, and complaint and due process procedures, the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Advisory Committee (CSPDAC) has never been more important.

Personnel development is central for each of these educational issues. At a recent workshop, an expanded CSPDAC team identified roles, responsibilities, and innovative practices for delivering training at local, regional, and state levels. Some of the ideas include expanding communication about regional training, creating strong links with the institutions of higher education, and holding roundtable discussions with general and special educators.


In addition to personnel development issues, California will receive more than \$9 million during the next five years, or approximately \$1.8 million per year from the State Improvement Grant (SIG). The purpose of the grant is to improve systems for providing educational, early intervention, and transitional services, including professional development systems and disseminating knowledge of best practices to improve results for children with disabilities.


CSPDAC and the regional coordinating councils (RCCs) will be restructured to meet the demands of the SIG. The procedure for the flow of funds that have provided incentives for regional training is currently under review by the Special Education Division. Let us know your thoughts about restructuring CSPDAC, the function of RCCs, and possible changes in the flow of funds for regional training. 



For information, contact Janet Canning, CSPD coordinator, at 916/327-4217.

## PROGRAM GUIDELINES UNDER REVISION

**T**hree sets of program guidelines are being revised by the California Department of Education, Special Education Division and State Special Schools, and are in various stages of completion.

 Last updated in 1986, *Guidelines for Program Standards for Deaf and Hard of Hearing* is in a final draft stage. These guidelines, which reflect field input and public comment, have been organized into standards that are aligned with Education Code. There is also a major focus on treating students who are deaf and hard-of-hearing as learners, not students with disabilities. A final review process has begun.

 *Program Guidelines for Language, Speech, and Hearing Specialists Providing Designated Instruction and Services* are being revised by Judy Montgomery, past president of the California Speech and Hearing Association and a professor at Chapman University. As principal writer, Montgomery is working closely with consultants and a peer review committee that will provide feedback. A draft document is anticipated in the fall.

 A task force has been formed to update *Guidelines and Procedures for Meeting the Specialized Physical Health Care Needs of Pupils* to include information for compliance with new regulations and Education Code, as well as information regarding new developments in medical technology and health care systems affecting medical/health services in schools. The Committee includes 24 members representing parents, school nurses, doctors, administrators, agencies, state level agencies and community organizations. 


For information about the *Guidelines for Deaf and Hard of Hearing*, contact Nancy Sager, 916/327-3868; *Speech and Language*, contact Montgomery at 714/997-6844; or *Specialized Physical Health Care Needs*, contact Patricia Michael, 916/323-1557.

## ALLIANCE TO ADDRESS STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

**D**espite evidence that prevention services are more cost effective and have greater results, special service personnel, such as resource specialists, have seen their workloads and responsibilities increase without increases in their funding and other resources.

To address these and other issues that create barriers to learning, a newly-formed alliance among members of several professional state organizations is aiming to create a policy shift that will make clear the need for school-based programs and personnel.

The California Student Support Services Alliance advocates for high quality student support services, which have not been addressed in recent education reform efforts such as class size reduction or standards improvement. Its more than 18,000 members are from the California Association of School Psychologists (CASP), California Association of Resource Specialists+, California Speech-Language-Hearing Association, California School Nurses Organization, School Counselors Association of California, California Chapter of the School Social Workers Association, and California Child Attendance and Welfare Officers Association.

While each of these organizations has developed and implemented their own legislative programs, members joined together to form a collective voice and to find more effective ways to obtain increases in state funding for student support services. 


For information, contact Brent McFadden, CASP legislative advocate, at 916/444-1595.

## DIAGNOSTIC CENTERS OFFER SPECIALIZED TRAININGS, ASSESSMENTS

**D**iagnosis, assessment, and interventions to use with students with autism continues to lead the list of most frequently requested training topics for the state's three Diagnostic Centers, according to their 1997-98 Year-End Report.

The Centers, part of the California Department of Education, Education Equity, Access, and Support Branch, State Special Schools and Services Division, offer free staff development trainings to local education agencies (LEAs) and parents, and also provide field-based, on-site, and combination assessment services.


In the area of training, 281 presentations were made to nearly 15,000 people on the topics of autism, behavior interventions, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, social skills, transition, and learners with difficulties. This represents an 8 percent increase from 1996-97. Parent groups were provided 37 presentations, up from 24, with transition and autism being the two most requested subjects.

In-depth assessments and professional consultations also were provided to more than 1,700 special education students and LEAs. Training can be scheduled through school districts, special education local plan areas, county offices, or regional coordinating councils. 

For more information, contact your local Diagnostic Center: Fremont, 510/794-2500; Fresno, 209/445-5982; or Los Angeles, 213/222-8090.

## TRAINING VIDEO AVAILABLE FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

**A** new training video and support manual designed to assist districts in preparing paraprofessionals who will work in inclusive general education classrooms is now available for free through the California Confederation on Inclusive Education (CCIE).

CCIE created "The Paraprofessional's Role in Inclusive Classrooms" with the Interwork Institute of San Diego State University with funding from the California Department of Education, Special Education Division. The 60-minute video provides information on the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The manual serves as a notetaking guide, and it also contains information on collaboration. 

For a copy of the materials, call 916/492-9999.



## Begin at the Beginning

A crucial element of SKOR is its kindergarten component called KinderClub, which also illustrates how the school has blended its resources to serve all kids.

Kelly Mahoney, a speech and language therapist, spends 50 percent of her time serving students with individualized education programs (IEPs) and the remaining 50 percent with groups of six kids each who ranked in the lower end of the school's 240 kindergartners following report cards.

As Barbara Pickard, a reading specialist who works with the first-grade classrooms and who joined the school in 1994 to help implement

SKOR, explained, "KinderClub is a highly verbal program. Kids are learning phonemic awareness concepts, which aid children when learning to read."

During the three 12-week sessions, Mahoney spends most of her time on phonemic awareness using rhyming, blending, and segmenting techniques such

as, 'I say the parts and you say the word-C-A-T.' 'I provide auditory bombardment,' she said. 'I want the kids to have a good base, an understanding of sound and phonemic awareness and language rich exposure so they can relate to stories and concepts. That foundation will spiral up to first grade and then second grade. If they need help, it shows along the way.'

## Double, Triple the Amount of Reading

For those students who do enter first or second grade and who appear to have attained the necessary skills, such as knowing the alphabet, knowing about rhyming, and knowing about books, but who are still unable to read, there is Monarch Reading.

"This is a very focused, highly structured curriculum that concentrates on core areas, such as vowels, decoding, and letter sounds," Pickard said. "It's not drill, but material is frequently revisited until mastered. We work chorally—say and respond."

Described by Jones as a place where kids can go "to get a shot in the arm," Monarch Reading provides small group and direct instruction in addition to the reading program presented in the regular classroom, or as the principal called it, "a double dose of reading."

And for students who do have IEPs and who work with resource specialist Renee Berardi, it may provide a triple dose of reading—the regular curriculum, individualized instruction with Berardi, and Monarch Reading with Pickard or Judy Harris, the second-grade reading specialist.

By serving kids according to this prevention philosophy, students no longer need to fail before receiving help. Said Feldman, "This meets kids' needs where they are instructionally and avoids much of the bureaucracy, such as having to wait for "criterion-referenced failure before serious intervention took place."

It also makes for an extremely efficient system of special education referrals. "One thing we've seen," said Jones, "is that once a child is referred, it is really more than likely that he will qualify for services. He's been through KinderClub and Monarch Reading in first and second grade. If he is just not making progress, he might have a learning disability. We're no longer testing kids who do not qualify, which is exactly what we'd hoped for."

Berardi, a standing member of the school's Student Success Team, agreed. "This really helps narrow down who needs help instead of doing mass testing. If a child has had two sessions of Monarch Reading and is still struggling, that's a red flag," she said.

**If intervention is delayed until 9 years old, 75 percent will continue to have difficulty learning to read.**

(Lyon, 1997)

## What the Numbers Show

To assess progress, students at Mattie Washburn are evaluated four times a year on a staff-developed assessment that includes accuracy measures and fluency rates. The goal, said Jones, is to have every child a fluent reader by second grade. "We're currently at 80 percent," she noted, a huge jump from just three years ago. "In September 1996 we had 50 emerging readers, in November 1996 we had 15, and in February 1996 we had five."

Hard data collected by Pickard indicated that in May 1998, 90.4 percent of second graders were early fluent or above, an 8 percent improvement over 1997, and a 30 percent improvement over 1997.

And then there are the anecdotes. "One child, Alex, was so shy, he would never speak above a whisper," Pickard said. "He slept through the whole first grade. In second grade, we did regrouping, an intensive reading project that extends for eight weeks. He went from the third lowest out of 240 students to grade level in six months. Seeing him read, it was so tremendous. He found his voice, and he's never looked back." 📖

For more information call Benita Jones 707/837-7727.

## "HELPING" Continued from page 9

Ginny Towle, a resource specialist program (RSP) teacher, has been using this kind of instruction since the 1980s. "It provides decodable, controlled text," she explained, "meaning that it does not have words the students can't read. In a general education class, reading is all literature-based. You have proper nouns and higher grade level words. With kids in our classes the instruction is different. They come in here and they can read."

That, noted Johnson brings up another important factor. "The child is always set up to be successful. They are never asked to do what they haven't been taught," she said, adding, "Studies also indicate that the skills students are learning are transferable to literature-based programs in general education."

Towle also conducts cross-age peer tutoring with third and fifth graders to help them master vocabulary words and to read successfully in the general education curriculum materials. Each week, the younger students read beside the older ones who explicitly teach them to read stories from their text books. During the last five minutes of the session, a timed reading is done on the previous week's material to measure progress.

## Built-In Testing

To assess a child's reading level initially and throughout the program, placement and progress tests are administered. For example, every five lessons a timed reading test measures fluency and accuracy. "This reading program charts the student's progress," said Towle. "I can't think of anyone who hasn't been able to make progress." The RSP teacher also uses the Woodcock-Johnson as an assessment tool.

Knight is also pleased with her students' overall progress. "Sometimes I have to repeat a lesson but for the most part, it's surprising how well the students do. It's very rare when it doesn't work. What is so wonderful is that when the children read they can feel their own success. They've had a hard time in the regular reading program and have developed a phobia about reading. I can reassure them by saying, 'Anything you need to know, I will teach you.'" 📖

For more information call Barbara Johnson at 408/755-0300.

**15 percent of the U.S. population (1 out of 7 Americans) have some type of learning disability (NIH)**



# R e s o u r c e s I N F O R M A T I O N

The RISE Library is moving to a new home. Watch for more information in future issues of The Special Edge.

## LITERACY

### **Developmental Reading Disabilities**

Goldsworthy, C.L., Singular Publishing Group, San Diego, CA (1996). Theoretical issues, research, and intervention strategies for working with preschool, elementary, and middle school-aged children with language, reading, and learning problems. 301 pp.

### **Fourteen Spelling Strategies for Students with Learning Disabilities**

Fulk, B.M. & Stormont-Spurgin, M., *Intervention in School and Clinic* 31(1) (1995). Teacher-directed and student study techniques based on research in spelling and motivation, for optimizing spelling instruction. 5 pp.

### **The Case for Early Reading Intervention**

(In: B. Blachman [ed.] *Foundations of Reading Acquisition and Dyslexia* Foorman, B.R., et al. (1997). Supports for early reading interventions.

### **Campaigns for Moving Research Into Practice**

Carnine, D., *Remedial and Special Education* 20(1) (1999). Discusses responsibility of moving education forward by translating research into practice and giving six steps of a campaign to bring about change. 6 pp.

### **Catch Them Before They Fall**

Torgesen, J.K., *American Educator* (1998). Practical advice to prevent reading failure grounded in knowledge from the past two decades. Focuses on early identification of children at risk and methods for monitoring growth of critical early reading skills. 8 pp.

### **Ladders to Literacy**

O'Connor, R., Notari-Syverson, A., & Vadasy, P., *Exceptional Children* 63(1) (1996). Study suggests that intervention by nonresearch personnel can be effective to improve literacy outcomes of children with a broad range of ability. 14 pp.

### **Parents Working with Speech-Language Pathologists to Foster Partnerships in Education**

Farber, J.G. & Goldstein, M.K., *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, Rockville, MD (1998). Parent involvement program by speech-language pathologists as part of a program to improve academic achievement and literacy by focusing on communication skills. 11 pp.

### **The Future of Children**

Lyon, G.R., Center for the Future of Children, David and Lucille Packard Foundation, Los Altos, CA (1996). Discusses legal history of special education, including status of IDEA; identification of learning disabilities and early reading problems; effectiveness of intervention; and how special education students fare after leaving school. 173 pp.

### **Literacy Assessment: A Handbook of Instruments**

Rhodes, L.K., Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., Portsmouth, NH (1993). Assessment instruments to directly link to a teacher's instruction, goals, and assessment questions. Notes on literacy at home, program placement, and assessment and teaching. 181 pp.

### **Accelerating Reading Progress in Early Literacy Project Classrooms**

Englert, C.S., et al., *Remedial and Special Education* 19(3) (1998). Study to determine efficacy of the Early Literacy Project (ELP) in improving reading performance of students with mild disabilities. Suggests ELP approach can be integrated into general education curriculum. 19 pp.

### **Interventions for Students with Learning Disabilities**

Sturomski, N. & Ellis, W., National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, Washington, DC (1997). Contains "Teaching Students with LD to Use Learning Strategies" (Sturomski), which discusses teaching students how to learn, and "Phonological Awareness" (Ellis), focusing on its role in the ability to read. Includes resource listing. 16 pp.

### **How Are California's Learning Disabled Students Doing?**

McDaid, J., et al., California Department of Education, Special Education Division, Sacramento, CA (1994). Study designed to "establish data collection procedures that survey special education students' progress" in academic, educational, social, and economic functioning. 155 pp.

### **Teaching Effective Comprehension Strategies to Students with Learning and Reading Disabilities**

Swanson, P.N. & De La Paz, S., *Intervention in School and Clinic* 33(4) (1998). Discusses metacognitive comprehension strategies to teach reading to general and special education students. 10 pp.

## NEW ACQUISITIONS

### **The Learning Standards and Alternate Performance Indicators for Students with Severe Disabilities**

Advisory Committee for the Standards of Students with Severe Disabilities, University of the State of New York, Albany, NY (1998). Links alternate performance indicators developed to reflect appropriate educational outcomes for students with severe disabilities. 60 pp.

### **Testing Students with Disabilities**

Thurlow, M.L., Elliott, J.L., & Ysseldyke, J.E., Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA (1998). Strategies for testing students with disabilities to comply with district and state requirements. Includes forms, checklists, staff development information, and technical assistance and dissemination networks. 296 pp.

### **The 1998 N.O.D./Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities**

Risher, P. & Amorosi, S., Louis Harris & Associates, Inc., New York, NY (1998). Nationwide survey found Americans with disabilities still lag well behind other Americans in many of basic aspects of life. Includes data tables and survey questionnaire. 156 pp.

### **Caring For Our Children: Our Most Precious Investment**

Terzian, R., et al., Milton Marks Commission on California State Government Organization and Economy (Little Hoover Commission), Sacramento, CA (1998). Study focused on adequacy of funding, equity of educational opportunity, state versus local control, base and categorical funding, and special education. Recommendations given. 117 pp.

### **Developing Your Child's Vision**

Takeshita, B., Center for the Partially Sighted, Santa Monica, CA (1999). Booklet focuses on children from birth to age 8; gives strategies to help children reach their full vision potential. Includes assessment and modification strategies. 12 pp.

### **Children's Psychological Testing: A Guide for Nonpsychologists**

Wodrich, D.L., Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore, MD (1997). Explains specialized language of psychological testing and helps in referrals, detection of developmental delays, IEP development, and IDEA service identification. Includes consideration of cultural and developmental factors. 416 pp.

### **Steps to Independence**

Baker, B.L. & Brightman, A.J., Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore, MD (1997). Shows how to teach essential social, self-help, and information skills to children with special needs, including computer use, sample activities, skills inventories, and behavior problem management. 400 pp.

## VIDEOS

### **How to Help Your Child Succeed in School**

Rief, S., Educational Resource Specialists, San Diego, CA (1997). Information for parents of students with ADHD and/or learning disabilities. 56 min.

### **Learning Disabilities-Learning Abilities**

Potts, M. & R., Vineyard Video Productions, West Tisbury, MA (1997). Six-part series shows at-risk children going from speaking to reading, writing and spelling, using explicit, multisensory, systematic teaching, based on language structure.

### **Accommodating Students with Learning Disabilities in Colleges and Universities**

Maloney, M., LRP Publications, Horsham, PA (1996). Explains who the law covers, what accommodations or modifications are reasonable or required, and where the obligations to provide accommodations begin and end. 20 min.

## LEARNING DISABILITIES

### **Individualized Instruction for the Educationally Handicapped**

Campbell, J., Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd., Springfield, IL (1998). Successful individualized instruction as clinical teaching, the process of assessment, planning and carrying out instruction, evaluating performance, and modifying the instructional plan through analyzing the student's learning ecology. 185 pp.

### **The Complete Learning Disabilities Directory**

Mackenzie, L., Grey House Publishing, Lakeville, CT (1997). Sources on adult literacy; attention deficit disorder; classroom resources; committees; conferences; computers; vocational and transition skills; exchange programs; government agencies; and more. 652 pp.

### **Language-Related Learning Disabilities**

Gerber, A., Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore, MD (1993). Discusses relationship between learning disabilities and the linguistic and cognitive factors that contribute to academic failure. 445 pp.

### **Frames of Reference for the Assessment of Learning Disabilities**

Lyon, G.R., Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore, MD (1994). Comprehensive discussion of current research and progressive measurement strategies. 650 pp.

### **Collective Perspectives on Issues Affecting Learning Disabilities**

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, Pro-Ed, Austin, TX (1994). Essays include definitions, service delivery models, assessment, general and special education, the ADA, inclusion, and postsecondary education opportunities. 110 pp.

### **Mathematics Strategies for Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities or Mathematics Deficiencies**

Miles, D., *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 31 (2) (1995). Describes common learning difficulties and how to assist high school students in developing problem-solving, conceptualization, and math skills. 6 pp.

construction, the discrepancy is "virtually impossible to pick up before third grade." But by that time, it is very difficult to learn to read—75 percent will still have reading difficulties in the ninth grade.

On the other hand, research has demonstrated that

*"Instruction in phonological awareness at the kindergarten level has significant positive effects on reading development during the first grade. Proper instruction carried out by informed teachers can prevent reading failure both for children with inherent learning disabilities in basic reading skills and for children whose lack of exposure to 'language rich' environment and language development activities during the first five years of life places them at risk for reading deficits."*

—(Blachman et al., 1994)

### Initiative Promises Training, Materials

The CRI has legislatively supported improved instructional materials, increased teacher training, and reduced class sizes in kindergarten through grade three. However, special education teachers have not consistently been included.

"We never get the materials—it's grab whatever you can," said Latno. "And it's infrequent that special ed teachers get to attend a general education training on reading." Class Size Reduction legislation has also excluded special education special day classes.

Burness said often special education has been considered separately in staff development activities. "General and special educators have been guilty of keeping instruction separate." She sees more joint planning now.


Lyon said the biggest stumbling block to implementing effective reading instruction is adequate teacher preparation. Not only have teachers been 'diverted by a philosophically-based understanding of how reading is developed,' they rarely receive adequate, research-based instruction on language development and reading instruction in credentialing programs.

The burgeoning number of students in California coupled with smaller classes in the primary grades has made preservice virtually nonexistent these days, observed Latno. "Teachers are put straight into the classrooms as long-term substitutes and on emergency credentials or waivers. New requirements for the Reading Instruction Comprehensive Assessment (RICA) do not apply to special education teachers as they no longer need the multiple subject credential as a prerequisite to the specialist credential. Teachers often get only two courses in teaching methods, only one in reading instruction, lamented both Latno and Lyon.

"If special ed teachers are not involved in district training in reading instruction, where are they going to get it?" Latno asked.

### Next Steps—SIP, AB 602

Parker is optimistic special educators and parents will participate in the California Reading Initiative. Significant training is anticipated with California's recent award of nearly \$9 million for personnel development to support the State Improvement Plan for Special Education which places a high value on literacy.

Lyon cautions, however, that "when policymakers consider 'inclusionary' models of instruction, they must consider carefully whether those models can provide the critical elements of intensity and the appropriate duration of instruction, along with teaching expertise in multiple methods and in accommodating individual learning differences." 


For more information, call Rice at 916/327-0843.

## SUPREME COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF STUDENT WITH DISABILITIES

**A** recent Supreme Court decision ruled in favor of a student with disabilities, saying the school district must pay for nursing care needed during school hours.

In *Cedar Rapids Community School District v. Garret F.*, the district declined to accept financial responsibility for the services needed by a student in a wheelchair who was ventilator dependent and required one-on-one continuous nursing care. To assure that all children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) authorizes federal financial assistance to states that agree to provide such services.

Citing *Irving Independent School District v. Tatro*, the Court used an analysis of "related services" called the bright-line test: Services provided by a physician in school (other than for diagnostic and evaluation purposes) are subject to the "medical services" exclusion in school, but services provided by a nurse or other qualified staff in school (health services) are not. Therefore, IDEA's "related services" definition under the *Tatro* decision, required the school district to provide Garret F. with the nursing services he required.

California schools have provided "related services," including health services, to students during the school day for many years. Students requiring specialized physical health services, including one-on-one supervision, are most often assisted by qualified designated staff trained and supervised by a credentialed school nurse. 

For more information on this case, visit <http://laws.findlaw.com/US/000/96-1793.html>.

## FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS PANEL PRESENTS RECOMMENDATIONS

**T**hree regional forums on "Building Family Partnerships" resulted in recommendations on strategies to model and encourage family partnerships. The State Panel on Family Partnerships brought these recommendations to the California Department of Education (CDE), the Partnership Committee on Special Education, and the Advisory Commission on Special Education.

Following are the five areas targeted:

### Procedural Safeguards Resource and Referral

- Disseminate user-friendly and jargon/acronym free materials.
- CDE should state prior to receiving information that consultants are mandatory reporters of complaints and they report to districts.
- Require local plans to document collaboration efforts with Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs), family resource centers, and other agencies that promote family partnerships.

### Complaint Processing

- Have independent ombudsman at local education agencies and special education local plan areas to help resolve conflicts.
- Develop a multilingual manual on "How to Avoid Complaints."
- Focus on providing all parties with information and provide alternative ways to resolve conflicts
- Provide training and information that stresses understanding the other side's perspective (teacher understanding parent, parent understanding administrator, etc.).

### Training and Technical Assistance

- Prepare culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically accessible training.
- Integrate training and technical assistance through the State Improvement Grant as part of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development.
- Offer customized analysis and planning and provide ongoing support, follow-up, and measurable outcomes.

### Quality Assurance and Focused Monitoring

- Include a parent survey with individualized education programs, individualized family service plans, and individualized transition plans on student progress, amount of parent/family involvement, and training.
- At least 51 percent of the monitoring teams should be family/primary caregiver/consumer representatives.
- Compensate family team members as consultants for their expertise.

### State Improvement Grant Family Participation Fund

- Distribute funds to parents and other primary caregivers who do not have access to other funds or who are members of underrepresented populations to provide stipends for travel expenses to attend regional and state-level decision making activities.
- Use PTIs on a voluntary basis to distribute funds.

For more information, contact Linda Blong, program manager, California Services for Technical Assistance and Training (CalSTAT), at 707/664-4399.



## JULY

**July 9-10** • "High Quality Schools: Effective School Board Leadership," California School Boards Association, Monterey. Contact: 800/266-3382.

**July 26-29** • "Crossing Alligator River: Alternative Dispute Resolution Skills," California Services for Technical Assistance and Training (CalSTAT), Santa Rosa. Contact: 707/664-4399.

**July 26-29** • Administration of Special Education Level II, California Services for Technical Assistance and Training (CalSTAT), Santa Barbara. Contact: 707/664-4399.

## AUGUST

**August 6-7** • 12th Annual Northern California Early Childhood Education Conference, California Department of Education, Radisson Hotel, Sacramento. Contact: 916/263-3871.

**August 10-12** • "School's In!" California Department of Education, Sacramento Convention Center. Contact: 916/323-8353.

## SEPTEMBER

**September 30-October 1** • "Inclusive Communities-Looking Beyond 2000," Supported Life Institute, DoubleTree Hotel, Sacramento. Contact: 916/263-1155.

## OCTOBER

**October 1-2** • "Seasons of Change: Keeping Your Balance During a Season of Change," California Association of Program Specialists, DoubleTree Hotel, San Jose. Contact: [www.program-specialists.org](http://www.program-specialists.org)

**October 18-19** • California Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance 26th Annual Fall Conference, DoubleTree Hotel, Sacramento. Contact: 916/922-3596.

**October 21-23** • Learning Disabilities Association, State Conference, Concord Hilton. Contact: 916/725-7881.

**October 23-27** • "A New California Special Education Fall Conference," California State Federation Council for Exceptional Children, DoubleTree Hotel, Costa Mesa. Contact: 916/443-3855.

**October 25** • "Implementing IDEA," Southwest Special Education Local Plan Area and Family Resource Center, LAX Hilton, Los Angeles. Contact: 310/479-3016.

## Special Education Workshops

**Ensuring All Students Learn to Read Well: Linking Research to Practice in Elementary Reading Programs**  
Santa Rosa • **July 26-28**

**Crossing Alligator River: Alternative Dispute Resolution Skills**  
Santa Rosa • **July 26-28**

Contact: California Services for Technical Assistance and Training (CalSTAT), 707/664-3062.

## NOVEMBER

**November 4-6** • California Reading Association 33rd Annual Conference, Long Beach Convention Center. Contact: 714/435-1983 x10.

**November 11-13** • Association of California School Administrators, 29th Annual Conference, Anaheim Hilton. Contact: 800/890-0325.

**November 18-21** • American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Annual Conference, San Francisco. Contact: 301/897-5700.

## DECEMBER

**December 9-11** • California School Boards Association, Annual Education Conference, Moscone Convention Center, San Francisco. Contact: 916/371-4691.

**December 9-12** • Council for Exceptional Children, Division for Early Childhood, Annual Conference, Washington, D.C. Contact: 410/269-6801.

## JANUARY

**January 27-29** • "Technology, Reading and Learning Difficulties," 18th Annual International Conference, Educational Computer Conferences and the International Reading Association, San Francisco. Contact: 510/594-1838.

## ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMER TRAININGS OFFERED

**A**dministrative trainings designed for special education and other administrators are being offered this summer through California Services for Technical Assistance and Training (CalSTAT). "Administration of Special Education (Levels I and II)" is one of three intensives offered and is designed for individuals who are, or who plan to be, special education administrators, special education local plan administrators, program specialists, or other administrators. (See calendar above for other offerings.)

Also available are online databases with information about research-based practices including the National and California Tools and Strategies for Family Partnerships that allow the user to add information. Other databases include strategies that lead to positive outcomes and how they parallel best practices in general education. Technical assistance is available upon request. 📧

For information, contact CalSTAT at 707/664-3062 or visit their website at [www.sonoma.edu/cihs/calstatcalstat.html](http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/calstatcalstat.html).

To earn his certificate, Bobby must pass 16 different training modules on various aspects of firefighting such as hoses and ladders. Each module must be passed before proceeding to the next. Because of his reading disability, this sometimes proved difficult for Bobby, but certainly not impossible.

"The teacher knew I could do the work," he said. "He allowed me to make up work or have more time. It was a time factor. I kept failing because I could only get through half the test."

An active member of Station 51 in Sacramento, Bobby's first call was to Valley High School to help a female student who was experiencing an epileptic seizure. "I was stunned," he said recalling the experience. "I couldn't believe I was doing this, checking vitals and helping her into the ambulance." And lest one forgets he is 17 years old, the teenager added, "It was cool to be referred to as a firefighter."

At Columbia Community College, which is linked with the California Department of Firefighters as well as national programs, Bobby will work towards an associate degree. He expects the Fire Technician Certificate he will have earned to apply toward college credits.

## Family Support is Key

Smith also mentioned the key role his family has played in their son's success. "By the senior year, most parents back out," she said, "but not here. He clearly comes from a home where he's supported." Added Ramsey-Lewis, "Both parents come to his IEP meetings, his mom keeps in close contact with us, and they attend back-to-school nights."

Bobby put it a little differently. The youngest of five children, four boys and one girl, he said, "My parents always pushed us. If my mom saw you had homework, she'd sit with you until it was done. My brothers are more physical. They say, 'You get an A or we'll hurt you!'"

On a more serious note, though, Bobby knew where he was headed had he not received the help he did and had he not learned to advocate for himself and work hard. "One of two things would have happened," he said. "I would've gotten locked up or I'd be dead. Those were the only alternatives."

And despite the friendly warnings, Bobby is very close to his brothers, especially the one that was born right before him. "I visit him every weekend, even if I have to bring my homework with me," he said. "We go jet skiing or just hang out. When I'm there I see what I could have. I know what's out there and I will accomplish it." 📧

# Fire with Fire

TO FULFILL HIS DREAM

by Elissa Provance, Associate Editor

During a recent weekend in May, members of the Gomez family made a trip to Sonora so they could see what living arrangements would be like for 17-year-old Robert, who will enter Columbia Community College in August. While the trip to Sonora was not a particularly long one from his home in Elk Grove, Robert's journey through high school was a bumpy one that could have easily ended in disaster.

The Elk Grove High School senior, who prefers Bobby over the more formal Robert, entered his soon-to-be alma mater in 1996 as a 10th grader who had transferred from another high school with a grade point average (GPA) of 0.83. One year later, he had earned a 2.45 GPA, was nominated and elected vice-president of the MAYA Club (Mexican American Youth Association), and was selected by the local Rotary Club as a proven leader in the Elk Grove Unified School District.

"Bobby is a really good example of what happens when all the positive forces of special education come together," said Caron Ramsey-Lewis, chair of the Department for Special Education and Bobby's caseload teacher. "He came in with a resource specialist program individualized education program (IEP), four 'Ds,' two 'Cs,' and five 'Fs.' If you look at enough transcripts, you get to know who will succeed. I wasn't too optimistic."

## Discovering the Problem

Bobby traced his academic troubles to 8th grade. "I didn't have any goals, I didn't care, and I didn't know who to ask for help. I felt no hope."

He especially had difficulties with reading. "If we had to read a book, I'd read it," he said, "but I wouldn't remember it. I got overwhelmed. I finally got tested and they found a reading comprehension disorder."

By the time he arrived at Elk Grove, Bobby was so credit deficient, it would be almost impossible for him to graduate on time. "We made a number of modifications to his program and did a lot of creative things with scheduling to get him up to speed, including night school and summer school," said Ramsey-Lewis. "He had fairly severe language and reading issues and several things had gotten in the way of him being successful. We put him in a special day class for world history and United States history and a resource program for basic math, attention, concentration, and sensory motor integration skills. We created a schedule where he could be successful and it didn't take us long to figure out he could follow through. Robert is really willing to work for what he wants. He doesn't expect it to be given to him."

Ramsey-Lewis also explained that at Elk Grove, reading and writing are taught by a language and speech therapist, who worked with Bobby during his sophomore year on reading, writing, and comprehension. "We would go over books, read them, then the next day, we would review questions from the previous day," he said. It was through this process that Bobby discovered a love of poetry to add to his love



Bobby Gomez, 17 years old, has earned his place at Station 51 in Sacramento.

of extreme sports like jet skiing and motorcycles.

This year, the student leader is enrolled in four classes, three of which are general education—government/economics, English, and math. His fourth class is study strategies, which supports his vocational goal of earning a Fire Technician Certificate through the Transition Partnership Program, where Joanne Smith, his vocational counselor, first met him.

"I always thought he acted older than his age," Smith said of Bobby. "We would spend time before his individualized transition plan meetings or I would go to the Department of Rehabilitation with him. He is very articulate."

## Firefighter in the Making

Bobby was introduced to firefighting through his school's "Every 15 Minutes" program, which educates students about the dangers of drunk driving through a mock crash on campus.

"I met a firefighter and spoke with him a lot," Bobby recalled. "Once I figured out what the job description was, I knew it was for me. I love people, I have good communication skills, I love the outdoors, and I love working with kids."



'FIRE' continues on page 15

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